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Illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Security Council
Seventy-third year

Identical letters dated 5 July 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

I write to you in follow up to previous letters to draw urgent attention to the imminent threat of forcible transfer facing the Palestinian Bedouin communities of Khan al-Ahmar — Abu al-Helu and Abu Nawar in the sensitive "E-1 area" of the West Bank, north-east of Occupied East Jerusalem.

In recent days, Israel, the occupying Power, has begun implementation of its plans to forcibly remove both the inhabitants and civilian and livelihood structures in this area to clear the way for its plans for the illegal construction and expansion of settlements in the area. These cruel and destructive measures not only are in grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention, thus constituting war crimes, but also threaten to completely sever East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, destroying whatever remains of the physical viability of the two-State solution.

For years, Israel has been advancing its plans to forcibly transfer and ethnically cleanse the Bedouin population of Khan al-Ahmar, 53 per cent of whom are children and 95 per cent of whom are Palestine refugees registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The known purpose of such plans is to facilitate the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in the area, in grave breach of international law and numerous United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolution 2334 (2016). Yesterday, the Israeli occupying forces, using bulldozers and other military machinery, began destroying all access routes in Khan al-Ahmar — Abu al-Helu, which is home to more than 180 civilians. At least 35 Palestinians were injured owing to the use of force by Israeli soldiers against the defenceless civilians protesting this illegal and provocative action that is traumatizing the entire community.

Faced with the occupying Power's ongoing threats against and cyclical demolition of the homes and schools of the Khan al-Ahmar community, we have repeatedly appealed to the international community to address this critical matter.

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Regrettably, in the absence of concrete international action, the occupying Power remains undeterred, persisting unabated with its crimes in full view of the world, without any fear of consequence.

The flagrant and systematic nature of these crimes has been on full display, as, on 24 May, the Israeli "Supreme Court" approved the demolition and transfer of the entire community of Khan al-Ahmar — Abu al-Helu for the purpose of constructing thousands of new units in the illegal "Ma'ale Adummim" and "Kfar Adummim" settlements, effectively endorsing a war crime. According to the Israeli plan, the community will likely be forcibly relocated to an area adjacent to a garbage dump in Abu Dis, bereft of agricultural land on which these pastoral families have subsisted all their lives.

This was followed, on 3 July, by the issuance of land confiscation notices by the occupying Power to residents of Khan al-Ahmar. Nearly all of the Khan al-Ahmar community's structures are slated for demolition, including a primary school, built in 2009 by the Italian aid organization Vento di Terra and which serves a total of 170 children from five different Bedouin communities in the East Jerusalem area.

Non-violent protests by the local residents of the Khan Al-Ahmar community, as well as by Palestinians from other nearby villages, joined by Israeli and international human rights and peace activists who gathered in the area to protect the community, were met with brutal violence by the occupying Power, resulting in the injury of 35 protesters.

In the meantime, since 1 July, at least another 11 such incidents of demolition and forced displacement have occurred. Fifty-nine Palestinians, including 37 children, have been displaced and more than 200 other civilians have been affected. The Abu Nawar Bedouin community, also located in the sensitive "E-1" area, has been the most deeply affected, following the demolition of 19 structures, including 9 homes, and the consequent forced displacement of 51 civilians, including 33 children. In this regard, it should be noted that Abu Nawar is among 46 Bedouin communities, comprising 8,100 people, in the central West Bank that are at imminent risk of forcible transfer.

Beyond the sheer immorality and illegality of such acts that aim to replace the indigenous population with colonial settlers, the destructive impact of such Israeli violations, amounting to blatant ethnic cleansing, both on these vulnerable Palestinian communities and on the situation on the ground is immense. This is starkly reflected in the deteriorating socioeconomic and humanitarian conditions and deepening anger and frustration among the Palestinian civilian population living under this more than a half-century of occupation.

The Palestinian people feel, rightly, that they have been abandoned. Seventy years after the creation of Israel and the dispossession and displacement of Palestinians in the Nakba, Palestinian families continue to be expelled from their homes and forcibly transferred from their lands, further deepening this injustice. In this regard, it should be noted that the Khan al-Ahmar and Abu Nawar Bedouin communities, like most of the other Bedouin communities in the central West Bank, are refugees who were expelled from their lands in the Naqab desert during the Nakba and are facing displacement yet again. For years, these communities have insisted on their right to return to their original lands in what is now southern Israel, a right that has been denied to them and to all Palestine refugees, in violation of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions.

The continuation of these illegal Israeli policies and practices are yet further proof of the ill intentions of this foreign colonial occupation and of the Israeli Government's total rejection of the human rights of the Palestinian people and of the

two-State solution. The ultimate aim of Israel, the occupying Power, in effecting the forcible transfer of these Bedouin communities, is to advance its so-called "E-1" settlement plan in order to create a continuum of settlements between the illegal "Ma'ale Adummim" settlement and Occupied East Jerusalem, severing the West Bank in half, and putting the final nail in the coffin of the two-State solution. In parallel, Israel is also getting closer to enacting so-called "legislation" to formally annex parts of the West Bank, in flagrant defiance of international law, including the prohibition on the acquisition of territory by force, destroying all efforts aimed at securing a comprehensive, just and lasting peace.

Israel must be held accountable for all of these crimes, without exception. It is outrageous that the occupying Power should believe that it can persist with its illegal colonization of Palestine, including destruction, theft and confiscation of Palestinian lands and properties, construction and expansion of both settlements and the Wall and forcible transfer of Palestinian communities, in full view of the international community, with zero accountability. It is inconceivable that, in the twenty-first century, an entire community can be expelled from their homes by an illegal occupation.

In addition, the Palestinian civilian population continues to endure attacks and incitement by extremist and terrorist Israeli settlers in the West Bank, no doubt provoked to such violence by right-wing Israeli government officials, who routinely incite against the Palestinian people.

While it is nearly impossible to document every violation, the examples below provide a glimpse of violations being endured daily by Palestinians as a result of settler violence.

On 19 June, in reference to Ali Dawabsha, the 18 month-old Palestinian baby whose house was torched by Israeli settlers in the middle of the night on 31 July 2015, resulting in the killing of his parents and the severe burning of Ali, extremist Israeli settlers chanted "Where is Ali? Ali's dead!" and "Ali is on the grill!" to a Palestinian crowd waiting outside an Israeli courthouse.

On 29 June, settlers from the illegal "Itmar" settlement burned dozens of olive trees on Palestinian lands in the area of Bayt Furik in the West Bank, under the protection of the Israeli occupation forces.

On 3 July, Elor Azaria, the Israeli soldier who in March 2016 shot dead an injured Palestinian man as he lay motionless on the ground, was invited by extremist Israeli settlers to the site of the shooting in Hebron and was greeted by cheering and toasting.

Against this backdrop of criminal activity in the West Bank, Israel also continues its aggression against the Gaza Strip, causing casualties to mount. The continued unlawful use of force against peaceful Palestinian protesters partaking in the "Great Return March" has raised the total number of Palestinians killed by the Israeli occupying forces since the launch of the protests, on 30 March 2018, to more than 140 people and the total number of injured to more than 15,200 people, including more than 4,000 injured by live ammunition. Among the casualties were many innocent children, including 19 killed.

The names of those killed in the period since our last letter include Yasser Abu al-Naja, age 11; Muhammad al-Hamaydeh, age 24; Osama Abu Khater, age 29; Ahmed Ziyad Tawfiq, age 21; Sabri Ahmed Abu Khdeir, age 24; Mohammed Ghassan Abu Daqa, age 22; and Abdelfattah Abu Azzam, age 17. Moreover, Mahmoud Majed Gharabli, age 16, succumbed to wounds sustained from Israeli sniper fire as he took part in the protests on 14 May.

Successive declarations of Israeli officials over recent weeks constitute open admissions that the killing of unarmed Palestinian protesters was not an oversight by soldiers but rather was the result of clear instructions and intent to shoot and kill. In this regard, we urge the Commission of Inquiry established by the Human Rights Council to identify those officials who sanctioned open fire regulations against civilians, including children, in violation of international norms.

In view of the grave humanitarian crisis in Gaza, where the health-care system has reached "the breaking point", as emphasized by numerous United Nations experts, including the Special Rapporteur on the right to health, we appeal to all States to continue their vital humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. We continue to stress the importance of UNRWA in this regard and reiterate our gratitude to all countries and organizations that participated in the UNRWA Pledging Conference on 25 June and have responded to the unprecedented financial deficit being faced by the Agency, providing additional funding or accelerating their contributions since the start of the year. We urge continued attention and generosity in the light of this critical situation and the far-reaching impact of any suspension of services on any of the Agency's fields of operation.

In this fifty-first year of Israel's colonial occupation of our people and land, we continue to call upon the international community to assume its long-overdue legal, political and moral responsibilities to protect the Palestinian people and to hold Israel accountable for its grave violations of international law, United Nations resolutions and the national and human rights of the Palestinian people. Faced with the forced dispossession and displacement of our vulnerable and defenceless civilians, including our Bedouin communities, and their constant repression and suffering at the hands of this illegal occupation, we appeal for action, including by the Security Council, to finally bring an end to this injustice and truly give peace a chance to prevail.

This letter is in follow-up to our 640 previous letters regarding the ongoing crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, which constitutes the territory of the State of Palestine. These letters, dated from 29 September 2000 (A/55/432-S/2000/921) to 11 June 2018 (A/ES-10/788-S/2018/557), constitute a basic record of the crimes being committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people since September 2000. For all of these war crimes, acts of State terrorism and systematic human rights violations being committed against the Palestinian people, Israel, the occupying Power, must be held accountable and the perpetrators brought to justice.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of the present letter distributed as a document of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 5, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Feda **Abdelhady-Nasser**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.